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SUBJECT: THAILAND POLITICAL UPDATE: PROTESTS CONTINUE, THAI
MAINSTREAM GROWING WEARY

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Privy Council President General Prem Tinsulanonda urged both the PM and the opposition to work together to end the crisis, a view which reflected the views of most Bangkokians according to a new ABAC Poll. Three Thai Ambassadors, including a former Ambassador to the U.S., spoke out at the anti-Thaksin rally last night, criticizing Thaksin's foreign policy, and policy towards the restive South. Tens of thousands of protesters are still at Government House. The pro-Thaksin "Caravan of the Poor" began staging rallies in northern Bangkok but Thaksin's handling of the political crisis is generating criticism within his party. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) In brief remarks to reporters on the evening of March 15, Privy Council President General Prem Tinsulanonda called on the opposing sides to work together to end the crisis and restore stability to the country. "I ask everyone to take action for the interests of the country...think of how to defuse the political situation." Prem did not answer reporter's questions about whether the Prime Minister should resign. Predictably, both factions seized on the statement as evidence of royal support for their side. According to a new ABAC poll (generally considered reliable), a growing number of Bangkokians (70 percent) want the Government and the protesters to hold peaceful talks and end the stalemate.

PROTESTS CONTINUE

¶3. (U) Three former Thai Ambassadors, including Kasit Piromya (NOTE: Ambassador to the United States from 2004-2005. END NOTE) and Asda Jayanama, former UN Perm Rep., addressed the PAD-led rally last night. Also present was media advocate Supinya Klangnarong, appearing mere hours after a Thai court found her not guilty of libeling the Thaksin family's Shin Corporation in a 2003 newspaper interview. The three Ambassadors criticized Thaksin's foreign policy, claiming that state visits to India were largely missions to benefit his own personal business interests. They called Thaksin's handling of the Southern situation inept, and said that his policies had failed to take into account the cultural uniqueness of the South. Ambassador Kasit noted that Bangkok-based diplomats disapproved of the Prime Minister's "lack of morality" but did not voice their opinions openly. (NOTE: Both Kasit and Asda are known for their particularly strong views against Deputy PM Surakiart Sathirathai. END NOTE)

¶4. (U) Tens of thousands of anti-Thaksin protesters, meanwhile, remain outside Government House. Protests remained peaceful, and a potential confrontation with the pro-Thaksin "Caravan of the Poor", consisting of mostly agricultural supporters from Thailand's rural North and

Northeast, was averted when the latter decided to stage their rally in northern Bangkok, instead of in the vicinity of the anti-Thaksin protesters at Government House.

DISSENSION IN THE TRT RANKS?

¶5. (U) In a meeting with Poloff, a TRT incumbent from the Eastern seaboard province of Chonburi expressed unhappiness with Thaksin's handling of the political crisis. Noting that his Thai Rak Thai party had occupied 373 seats in the Thai Parliament prior to dissolution, this MP viewed Thaksin's move to dissolve the assembly as self-serving. He noted that he was running unopposed in his district since all of his opponents, all from largely unknown minor parties, had been disqualified. He said that despite the lack of opponents, he was having to run a harder campaign than in 2005 due to heightened public scrutiny and disillusionment with TRT politicians. Local contacts noted that Thaksin still had the support of the rural population, but that this support was slipping due to the increasingly "balanced" coverage of the crisis in the media, particularly television.

PRIME MINISTER READY FOR A BREAK?

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT. Thaksin and his inner circle continued to disavow any intention of resigning. That said, there has been predictable speculation about Thaksin's comments at a Thai Rak Thai rally in Nakhon Ratchasima when he said that, under certain circumstances, he would be open to "going on a break." Although both sides still claim to have the upper hand, many of the breaks, e.g. the rulings by the Election Commission, don't seem to be going Thaksin's way.

BOYCE